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homemakers' chat
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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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Tuesday, December 8, 1942.

QUESTION BOX:
How clean a man's felt hat?
How get rid of cockroaches?

ANSWERS FROM:
Home economists and others in the U. S. Department of Agriculture

--ooOoo--

"How to do it" questions have the floor today..... how to clean a soiled felt hat.... how to get rid of cockroaches. Answers are from the scientists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

Let's take that hat question first. "My husband has two felt hats that are soiled. Could I clean them myself at home?"

You can often clean men's felt hats by simple home methods, the home economists say. Of course, it's easiest to clean a hat or anything else before it has become too dirty. And a man's felt hat will look better if you don't let it get out of shape from knocking about. But even if it looks pretty hopeless, you can at least improve it.

When a hat needs a complete dry-cleaning, rip off the ribbon and take out the leather head-band.... often called the "sweat-band". Usually this band is greasy. If you don't clean the band, as well as the hat, it will soon soil the freshly cleaned hat. There's a special way to clean a sweat-band. We'll come to that in a moment.

Brush the hat well to take off all loose dust. Use a stiff bristle brush and work with the nap of the felt. (Don't use a metal brush.... it will make the felt rough.) First try taking off any spots by rubbing them with art gum. On grease or oil spots, try a thick paste of cornstarch moistened with carbon tetrachloride. Spread the paste on the spotted area and let it dry thoroughly. Then brush it off. You can repeat this paste-cleaning several times, and maybe you

you won't have to dip the whole hat in a dry-cleaning fluid.

But if the hat needs more cleaning, you can dip it in carbon tetrachloride. This is a longer process than paste-cleaning, because after you dry the hat you have to block it. You do this on a hat block or a kitchen bowl padded to fit the crown. To dry-clean the hat, use a bowlful of carbon tetrachloride large enough to dip the whole hat in. Brush the hat with a stiff brush as you dip it. Then rinse the hat in fresh "carbon tet". Drain a few minutes, and blot up as much of the liquid as you can with a soft cloth. Let the hat dry completely before you press the brim or block the crown.

When you have fitted the crown of the hat smoothly and snugly on the mold, tie a cord tightly at the head size line to hold it in place. Then hold the hat to the spout of a steaming tea-kettle. Turn the hat constantly so that the moisture reaches evenly over the entire crown. (Don't allow the hat to get very wet.) Keep it on the mold until it is thoroughly dry.

To press after drying, lay the brim of the hat flat on an ironing board. Press with a warm iron over a damp press cloth. Use a continuous round and round motion of the iron. Finally rub the hat lightly with fine sandpaper and finish by brushing it with a soft brush. Begin at the tip of the crown and brush around in one direction, working outward until the entire surface is smooth.

Now, last of all, clean the sweat-band. Here's how. Put a teaspoonful of shaved paraffin into a pint of "carbon tet" in a glass jar. Stand the jar in warm water until the paraffin melts. Then put in the sweat-band, let it soak for half an hour, then take it out and brush it well. Rinse in a clean bath of paraffin and carbon tetrachloride. Rub it dry with a soft cotton cloth. Now you're ready to sew the sweat-band back in the hat, and put on a new ribbon, or the old one, cleaned, turned, and pressed.

From hats let's turn to an insect problem common in many households. This

letter comes from a woman living in a city apartment. "I believe I am a clean housekeeper..... I put away all food supplies in tight glass or tin containers.... and clean up spilled or scattered foods carefully. I also take out garbage promptly and keep my garbage can clean. But just the same I have noticed cockroaches in my kitchen lately. I wonder if they come from some other apartment in the building. What can I do to get rid of them permanently?"

The entomologists of the Department say that in apartment houses cockroaches migrate from one kitchen to another along water and steam pipes, and through any cracks that lead to the places they like to hide in... behind baseboards, or the woodwork around doors and windows. If you live in an apartment the first step in keeping out these insects is to find and close such runways. Fill them up with putty, plastic wood, or plaster of paris. Ask the apartment manager to send for a professional fumigator if you still find the roaches after using remedies against them yourself.

Two of the best remedies for killing cockroaches from day to day are borax and sodium fluoride powder. Sodium fluoride has the disadvantage of being poisonous if taken internally, so you have to keep it away from all food, and out of reach of the children and pets. Sprinkle the sodium fluoride around on shelves and the sink drainboards..... or wherever you have seen cockroaches. But be careful, while the powder is still around, not to set vegetables or other foods down on those places.

The best way to use sodium fluoride is with a small hand bellows or duster, which you can use to puff the powder into cracks where the roaches hide during the day. If you have a long rod attachment to your vacuum cleaner..... the one shaped so you can blow the powder into the cracks, behind the baseboards, and other hiding places, you can use that. The roaches come out at night, when the house is dark and quiet. Don't clean the powder up for 2 or 3 days. You may have to repeat the treatment after a week or so. (By the way, sodium fluoride is the basis of most roach powders you buy in stores.)

Borax is also recommended for use against roaches, in case you can't get sodium fluoride. Scatter it around the same way. One point to remember is that borax won't help if roaches can reach any food.

That is all the questions for today.

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